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Letter dated 7 October 2011 from the Permanent Representative of Nigeria to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to inform you that, under the presidency of Nigeria, the Security Council is scheduled to hold an open debate on the subject of security sector reform on Wednesday, 12 October 2011. In order to help steer the discussions on the subject, Nigeria has prepared a concept note entitled "Moving forward with security sector reform: prospects and challenges in Africa" (see annex).

I would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) U. Joy **Ogwu**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

11-53829 (E) 111011

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Annex to the letter dated 7 October 2011 from the Permanent Representative of Nigeria to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Moving forward with security sector reform: prospects and challenges in Africa

Concept note

Overview

The United Nations Security Council, under the Presidency of Nigeria in October 2011, will hold an open debate on security sector reform in the African context, with the aim of adopting a presidential statement on the subject. The reform of the security sectors in Africa is an issue of paramount importance to the United Nations and its membership. Although the bulk of United Nations security sector reform support is directed to Africa, and successful security sector reform relies heavily on the notion of national ownership, policy discourse related to security sector reform tends not to adequately involve States undergoing reform. Indeed, there has been only limited dialogue among countries receiving external security sector reform support and relatively few opportunities to openly discuss the dynamics of security sector reform assistance, including donor lessons learned, coordination, conceptual issues and other challenges and opportunities. Yet, experience has consistently demonstrated that success in security sector reform depends on the operationalization of the perspectives of the "recipients" of security sector reform assistance, that is, Member States that are receiving security sector reform support. In addition, while a number of African countries have been providing support related to security sector reform, their contributions are yet to be effectively captured as "donors" in such processes. Limited space for sharing knowledge and experience continue to weaken the perspectives of intra-African security sector reform "providers".

The emphasis on security sector reform in peacekeeping is necessary but not sufficient. Security sector reform cannot be solely understood as part of a peacekeeping agenda, which is by nature confined to the early aftermath of conflict. Lessons learned indicate that attempts to reform the security sector belong within the broader and more holistic spectrum of peacebuilding and development. Indeed, in view of the resilience of conflicts to current security sector reform engagements in Africa, the link between security sector reform, conflict prevention and socio-economic development will need to be emphasized. For these reasons, there is a need to expand the perception of African perspectives on security sector reform as essential elements of the legitimacy, viability and sustainability of security sector reform support.

Background

The involvement of the United Nations in security sector reform predated the usage of the term itself. While the term emerged only in the second half of the 90s, activities targeted at strengthening and reforming the security sector in promoting the conditions of durable peace and rule of law have been at the centre of the action plan of various departments, agencies, funds and programmes in the United Nations

system. However, in the absence of a unified and overarching security sector reform framework, the activities of the different bodies remained largely uncoordinated and compartmentalized.

The Security Council hosted its first ever open debate on security sector reform in 2007 under the Presidency of Slovakia. There was consensus on the need to create a comprehensive United Nations approach to security sector reform, accompanied by the necessary institutional and technical capacity at Headquarters and the field. The 2008 report of the Secretary-General entitled "Securing peace and development: the role of the United Nations in supporting security sector reform" (A/62/659-S/2008/39), defined the framework for security sector reform in the United Nations through the identification of key principles: national ownership; adaptability of security sector reform tools to particular country contexts; partnerships with and coordination among international actors; and sensitivity to gender issues, among others. The report also paved the way for the creation of a dedicated Headquarters-based Security Sector Reform Unit in the Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions, the expansion of security sector reform field capacities and the establishment of a system-wide Inter-agency Task Force in this important area.

Demand for security sector reform support has soared in the past few years. Security sector reform has been recognized as an essential element of multidimensional peacekeeping and peace processes. It is now part of the mandate of most new United Nations peacekeeping and special political missions, with 11 missions currently containing security sector reform capacities. Concomitantly, the nature of both mandates and requests has become more complex. This development has grown out of the realization that security sector governance is best placed within a broader policy framework and national agenda, if security sector reform is to be transformative and sustainable.

Objective of the debate

The objective of this debate is to allow the Council to take stock of the United Nations security sector reform approach and the principles set out by the Security Council in its presidential statement of 20 February 2007 (S/PRST/2007/3*) and the 2008 report of the Secretary-General on security sector reform; and to identify how the United Nations can best support recipient countries to take the lead in security sector reform efforts as a necessary precondition for the sustainability of early peacebuilding support. Three key areas are in need of particular emphasis:

1. Understanding security sector reform within the peacebuilding continuum;

2. National ownership I: facilitating recipient government-led coordination;

3. National ownership II: empowering the voices of communities and other national stakeholders beyond the State.

More specifically, the following concerns and questions can be posed in the three objective areas:

1. **How can the relevance of security sector reform, beyond peacekeeping, be effectively captured in United Nations operations, especially in relation to conflict prevention?**

Experience has shown that security sector reform is by no means limited to the aftermath of conflict but is also a crucial preventive tool in the service of long-term peace and stability, as underscored in previous presidential statements (see, for example, S/PRST/2010/14). Security sector reform should not be restricted to peacekeeping. It should constitute a major determinant of long-term peace and development within the wider State-building effort. Most notably, security sector reform is closely interconnected with economic indicators, including employment for youth and securing livelihoods for high-risk populations, an argument which has been elaborated in a growing body of literature, including the World Bank *World Development Report 2011*.

The relationship between conflict and the security sector is complex and multidimensional. In the absence of effective oversight and governance, security institutions become incapable of protecting populations against an internal or external threat. Sometimes, security providers not only fail to protect citizens, but they have also been known to marginalize, criminalize and exclude the very populations they are required to protect. Therefore, more attention is needed on the connection between security sector reform and conflict prevention. In order to guarantee better targeted, strategic interventions, an assessment of the ways in which an ineffective, inadequate or illegitimate security component contributes to conflict is also required. The relevance of security sector reform outside a peacekeeping context must be better appreciated and new forward-looking frameworks developed to better locate the security sector reform approach of the United Nations within a broader peacebuilding agenda.

Specific questions for the debate

In the light of the above analysis, the following questions may be discussed:

- What are the linkages among security sector reform, conflict prevention and peacebuilding?
- How should the United Nations approach account for and address these linkages?
- How does security sector reform fit within a broader conflict prevention and development framework?

2. **How can the United Nations better facilitate the process of nationally led coordination?**

From its inception in the United Nations context, security sector reform was envisioned as a nationally led process. The Secretary-General described national ownership in security sector reform "as the cornerstone of our approach" in his speech to the Security Council. The Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations has underlined the fact that security sector reform is a nationally owned process in every annual report since 2008.

First, despite the widespread consensus on the centrality of national ownership, there has been little clarity on what the term means in practice. The term

itself does not provide immediate clarity on who the actors are that should be leading the process and in what way.

In addition, one of the greatest challenges facing security sector reform has been the absence of a unifying coordination mechanism in view of the growth of bilateral and multilateral actors engaging in security sector reform and related activities. While national governments should have the responsibility for overall coordination of all security sector reform support, they are often too ill-equipped to effectively perform this function. Yet, it is apparent that coordination is itself a manifestation of ownership.

Finally, the need for coordination goes beyond the need to avoid duplication. In coordinating donor activities, national authorities are responsible for generating a strategic vision for the security sector, and then disseminating this vision to all stakeholders to inform various related activities in a coherent manner. Working out the policy implications of national ownership and country-led coordination therefore necessitates addressing issues of both political priorities and national capacity.

Donors have a crucial role to play in assisting governments in building capacity to spearhead security sector reform. They should, however, avoid undermining local growth by replacing functions necessarily performed by domestic structures. At the same time, national authorities must step up to their respective responsibilities in support of security sector reform efforts as no security sector reform process can be wholly nationally owned if implemented and funded solely by external donors.

Specific questions for the debate

In the light of the above analysis, the following questions may be discussed:

- What are the preconditions for nationally led coordination, and how can the United Nations assist in putting those in place?
- What should be the role of the United Nations in empowering and facilitating national authorities in leading and coordinating the security sector reform process? What are the challenges associated with this process, and how are they best overcome?
- What are the challenges in coordination between and within donors that must be resolved before governments can effectively take control of the process?

3. **In what ways can the voices of communities be amplified in the shaping of security sector reform agendas?**

Placing the host government in control of the security sector reform process is a necessary, but not sufficient, element of ensuring national ownership. While empowering governments to take the lead in coordinating donors, national ownership needs to move beyond a partnership with formal authorities towards a whole-of-society approach.

Wider consultative processes need to be created in order to encourage a truly nation-wide dialogue on security sector reform goals, priorities and implementation. A more comprehensive approach to the security needs of societies that cover the full spectrum of State to human security must be devised. The thorny question of the role of the international community in situations where there is a lack of national

consensus must also be addressed. In particular, a more inclusionary approach to security sector reform could be informed by recipient interests in:

Formulation of policy: local, national and regional understandings and priorities vis-à-vis the security sector should play a bigger role in the consultative process with Member States in the formulation of United Nations policy;

Implementation: ways to engage the various informal, non-statutory structures — civil society, parallel traditional leadership structures — should be worked out, guided by the sociocultural context and the particulars of the situation at hand.

Questions for the debate

In the light of the above analysis, the following questions may be discussed:

- What are the ways in which overall security sector reform processes can become more culturally sensitive and context specific?
- How can the United Nations support national authorities in ensuring the legitimacy and sustainability of the security sector reform process through the appropriate inclusion of all relevant stakeholders, including civil society?